

"Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here."

—Sue Monk Kidd,  
author of *The Secret Life of Bees* (and other books)

## PEOPLE & STORIES GENTE Y CUENTOS

### Board of Directors

Georgia Whidden,  
President

Andrea Honoré,  
Vice President

Anne Seltzer,  
Secretary

Michael Aaron,  
Treasurer

Julie Denny  
Alex Fajardo  
Barbara Flythe  
Charlotte Friedman  
Bhaveen Jani  
Mimi Mead-Hagen  
Mimi Schwartz

### Advisory Council

Jeremy Adelman  
Patricia Andres  
Cathryn Clary  
Mark Doty  
Lynne Fagles  
Claire Jacobus  
Landon Jones  
Paul Muldoon  
Udi Ofer  
Tracy K. Smith  
Michael Wood

Executive Director:  
Cheyenne Wolf

Founder:  
Sarah Hirschman

Newsletter Editor:  
Anndee Hochman

# word of mouth

NEWS FROM PEOPLE & STORIES / GENTE Y CUENTOS

## Santa Cruz Libraries Partner with CA Jails Programming reaches even those in solitary cells

The men at Rountree Medium Facility in Santa Cruz were already incarcerated. Then the pandemic brought more limits: no family visits; no in-person classes. But when People & Stories pivoted to Zoom sessions last fall, facilitator Julie Ward recalls, the program became a path out of confinement. "One of the participants said, 'This is the first time I've been out of this place in two years. I was able to escape in my mind.'"

Ward, a volunteer with the Santa Cruz Public Library, joined a team of librarians who have worked with the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Department for more than five years, bringing People & Stories to incarcerated women and men.

Librarian Jesse Silva, who leads outreach for jail services, focused on incarcerated populations when she was a library student. "I knew, going in, that I was going to have to be really flexible. That there would be barriers. That I would have to work under the corrections facility's guidelines. You have to be really persistent; our whole team has that mindset," she says.

Programming through the pandemic called for even more creativity and grit. Santa Cruz librarians ran two virtual groups—one at Rountree and one at the Blaine Street Women's Facility. They also provided "distance learning packets" that included the story, an author biography, discussion questions, a writing prompt and supplemental materials—for instance, information about the Chitimaucha tribe for "Night of the FEMA Trailers" by Vivian Demuth. Those packets enabled even those in solitary confinement to participate.

Ward, who has a longtime interest in restorative justice, learned about People & Stories after retiring from a 33-year career working in academic libraries. At first, library staff were wary of having a volunteer lead programming in jails. But Ward persisted; she took part in a People & Stories training and had led just two sessions in person before the pandemic began.

The virtual program at Rountree began last fall. "I'm impressed with how hungry [the men] are for classes and for stimulation and opportunities," she says. And while the Zoom platform can be challenging—one meeting room in the jail has an echo; it was difficult to hear masked participants—the discussions still hold moments of connection and surprise.

"Their observations are often unexpected or different from mine," Ward says. "That's what I like: having people with different perspectives."

Some favorite stories included "The Second Bakery Attack," by Haruki Murakami and "Saw Gang" by Wallace Stegner. Librarian Susan Nilsson notes the men's enthusiasm for stories that include Spanish phrases and cultural referents; they remind her of "the importance of people seeing themselves in literature."

She felt uncertain about bringing "Tiny, Smiling Daddy," a story by Mary Gaitskill featuring a lesbian protagonist. "But it was quite beautiful. There were a couple of men in the group who talked about a female family member coming out and the family's reaction to it."

For Silva, who has facilitated People & Stories since the first sessions at Rountree in 2016, the program dissolves barriers of class, age, gender and ethnicity. "When you peel back the layers, we really all want the same things: to be loved and happy and healthy. When I'm sitting in the room with up to 20 incarcerated men, and we're talking about big societal issues—racism, child abuse, family dynamics, immigration—it's incredible what can happen. And the story is a participant in that. The story is in the room with us, doing some of the work."

"We're talking about big societal issues... And the story is a participant in that. The story is in the room with us, doing some of the work."

## P&S/GyC Coordinators

Alabama  
Kelly Cardenas

Argentina  
Elisa Mayora

California  
Matthew Colvin  
Patricia Estes  
Darin Garr  
Stefanie Gyles  
Cristi Jenkins  
Mitch Lindenbaum  
Tanya Lindquist  
Maureen Martin  
Scott McClure  
Maile McGrew-Frede  
Rachel McKay  
Roxana Nessi  
Susan Nilsson  
Robert Oldfield  
Jameson Rohrer  
Jesse Silva  
Cassandra Wenzel

Colorado  
Cindy Welsh

France  
Katia Salomon

Georgia  
Aida Quiñones

Iowa  
Ruth Mahaffy

# Gente y Cuentos fosters Deep Connection

## NJ programs, virtual and live, are havens in hard times

by *Anndee Hochman*

They met in the park: faces masked, chairs set six feet apart in a wide circle. Sometimes a garbage truck grumbled by; sometimes an ice cream truck chortled its come-and-get-it melody or landscape workers used power saws to prune the trees. But the women—older adults from the Puerto Rican Association for Human

Development in Perth Amboy—listened, talked and connected through it all.

The Perth Amboy series, one of six People & Stories/Gente y Cuentos programs funded by the New Jersey Council on the Humanities (NJCH) for 2021, fostered a sense of community among longtime residents, newcomers to the U.S. and visitors, said coordinator María Sáiz.

*"If you survive these things, if you grow as a person, if you are there to tell someone else, you shouldn't be embarrassed or ashamed of what happened to you."*

The group included women from the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Argentina and Guatemala. "There's a group of women who know each other well, but there are always new participants," she said. "They help each other; the ones who drive pick up the ones who don't. It's nice to see how these women open up. Week by week, they start to tell about their lives."

After reading a story whose protagonist must decide whether to marry for money or for love, one woman told of being pressured by her grandmother to marry a rich man, then being disinherited when she refused.

"She told me after the session was over, 'You know, I really tried to speak to my children about these things, but it's so hard, they don't want to engage in this conversation. I felt like it took a weight from me, just telling this to someone,'" Sáiz said.

Another story, about a family that adopted an orphaned baby girl, coaxed one participant, a visitor from Guatemala, to talk about meeting her father, who had left the country for political reasons when she was very young. Her nervousness about meeting him eased when her mother assured her, "You were a wanted baby."

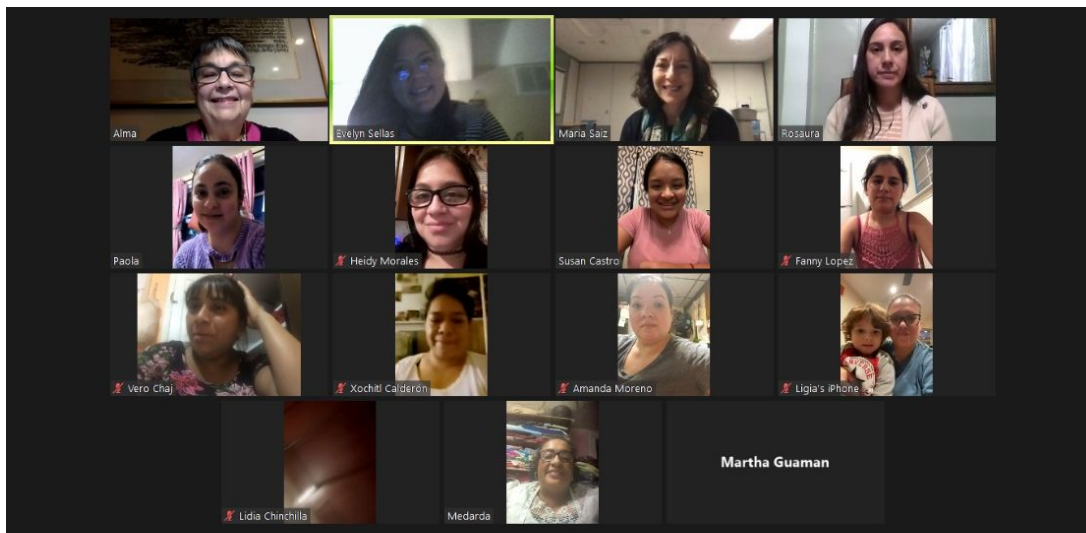
"This woman told the group, 'When you are an orphan, that's always something you carry with you: the fear of not being wanted or loved,'" Sáiz said.

Sáiz was continually surprised at the women's open-mindedness, humor and resilience. One laughed as she told the group that she wants her children to bury her with socks on because she always has cold feet. Others became tearful as they shared stories of displacement and fear.

Sáiz welcomed those disclosures—so different, she said, from the formal academic setting in which she was trained. "This is how literature should be—accessible, available to everybody...If you survive these things, if you grow as a person, if you are there to tell someone else, you shouldn't be embarrassed or ashamed of what happened to you."

In another NJCH-funded program, held virtually from March to May, women from





## P&S/GyC Coordinators

New Jersey  
 Patricia Andres  
 Lisa Chong  
 Alma Concepción  
 Liz Fernandez  
 Ted Fetter  
 Ellen Gilbert  
 Stephanie Hanzel  
 Connie Harsett  
 Virginia Kerr  
 Scotia MacRae  
 Angélica Mariani  
 Linda Martucci  
 Sally Maruca  
 Mimi Mead-Hagen  
 Ana Mejia  
 Libby Ranney  
 Maria Saiz  
 Marcy Schwartz  
 Pat Smith  
 Elena Uribe  
 Jenny Wilder  
 Richard Wilder

New York  
 Deborah Salmon  
 Lunia Vera

North Carolina  
 Dorothy Hodder  
 Meryle Leonard

Pennsylvania  
 Rachel Epstein  
 Scott Feifer  
 Ellie Fisher  
 Jill Gates Smith  
 Anndee Hochman  
 Lawrence McCarty  
 Rebecca Rozek  
 Sallie Van  
 Merkensteijn

Virginia  
 Jonathan Arries

Washington D.C.  
 Wanda Jones  
 Faith Kelley  
 Deborah McKinney  
 Megan McNitt  
 My Nguyen  
 Myra Remegio-  
 Leonard  
 Jayanthi Sambasivan  
 Janna Tanner  
 Alexis Waide  
 Eric White

Children’s Home Society in Trenton often Zoomed in while cooking dinner for their families, with their children playing nearby. Their connection became a lifeline during a time of quarantine and loneliness, said coordinator Alma Concepción. “They just love to hear these stories. One of the mothers said that she had been depressed with the pandemic and didn’t want to go anywhere; just coming together virtually with all these other people was something exceptional for her.”

While the Zoom sessions lacked the face-to-face immediacy of in-person gatherings, Concepción said there were some advantages to the online format: participants didn’t have to leave their homes, arrange care for their children or allow extra time for transportation. “It’s easier for them to access,” she said. “Maybe somebody who wouldn’t want to walk to the site just has to get the link, and there they are.”

The participants—recent immigrants from Colombia, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Mexico, mostly mothers in their 20s and 30s—talked about living in-between: speaking “Spanglish,” pursuing longtime dreams and,

“These are very strong women...they have gone through so much, even at a young age. They appreciate anything that brings joy to them. One of them said she had been depressed, and now that she could come [to Gente y Cuentos] for one hour, she was happy.”

sometimes, abandoning those dreams in an effort to fit in.

With one story, the women discussed how tradition sometimes becomes an obstacle to obtaining happiness. They brainstormed about meanings of the word “marvelous,” which occurs frequently in the story, “Artistas de variedades” by Daniel Moyano; some said “marvelous” is the feeling of falling in love, or the surge of any positive emotion. “Some talked about the dreams they had that could never be fulfilled. That’s one of the things we want to happen,” Concepción said. “That there’s a connection between the word and the personal experience.”

For CHS participants, especially during the pandemic, Gente y Cuentos sessions offered an antidote to days of joyless routine, wracking loneliness or incessant care for others. “For some of them, it’s a special moment to do something for themselves. Also, these are very strong women in the sense that they have gone through so much, even at a young age. They appreciate anything that brings joy to them. One of them said that she had been depressed, and now that she could come for one hour, she was happy.”

Concepción said they responded strongly to a story about a Cuban grandmother, living in Miami, who doesn’t want to die in her adopted country. “It’s kind of a fantastic story; she has her grandson build her a canoe so she can go back to Cuba... They said that the grandmother felt lonely in Miami. She wanted to return to Cuba where she had a community.” They said, “Here in Gente y Cuentos, we have a community.”



## From Executive Director Cheyenne Wolf

A year of breaching barriers & brainstorming new ways to be accessible



Among the deluge of mail that comes to People & Stories/Gente y Cuentos are letters from a man named Robert, or CDC#BH8140, according to the handwritten return address. The words *Vote for Biden!* claim space on a few of his envelopes, and a smiley face wearing sunglasses usually accompanies his signature.

Robert first wrote to us last summer when he learned that all the programs he'd signed up for in California's Ironwood State Prison would be cancelled. That news also dashed any hopes he had for earning time off his sentence by completing programs like ours. I sent him a few stories from our bibliography and encouraged him to share them, noting that this was a far cry from an in-person experience and promising that we would do everything we could to make People & Stories more accessible.

The handful of exchanges I had with Robert left an unshakable impression on me. Each of his letters was laced with a surprising optimism—usually reflected in an assortment of bright, colorful inks—despite the unfathomable reality of life behind bars during a global pandemic. His view of “lockdowns” helped me see my own COVID experience differently and urged our team to challenge accessibility barriers in the midst of a changing world.

I wish I could say we've found a way to reach participants like Robert more easily, but it turns out the barricades that serve to keep people in seem just as effective at keeping them out. What I can say is that asking bold questions in the face of impenetrable regulations led to some bright ideas, and grant awards have helped to bring those ideas to fruition.

In December, we will conclude a sixteen-month-long, NEA-funded strategic initiative that will bolster our coordinator trainings, expand the resources available to new and existing coordinators and better position us to train and support site staff already working with our target audiences who are interested in delivering P&S/GyC programs to their constituents. A grant award from the Bunbury Fund boosted our efforts by affording us ongoing consultation with a team of data specialists at Mathematica as well as with Jon Shure, a senior director at Taft Communications, who is working to help us craft a messaging platform. We are grateful for the many contributors and supporters helping to further this important piece of our 2021-2025 strategic plan.

We are also tackling access challenges in the here-and-now. A generous grant from the NJ Arts and Culture Recovery Fund sponsored our purchase of twenty Tablets, enough for a full roster of participants in a People & Stories or Gente y Cuentos series. This investment allows us to use accessibility features such as voiceovers, closed captioning and various visual assistance modes as part of an eight-week program series. Moreover, we can manage individual Tablets' settings remotely, including lock and locate functions, so we'll be able to lend out the devices safely and securely while also lending a hand.

Tackling accessibility barriers remains an uphill battle, but our courageous pursuit of creative solutions makes it worth the climb. It is thanks to our tireless team and the participants who've shaped us with their stories that we are on track to having greater program accessibility than ever before.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cheyenne Wolf'.

# West Orange Library group discusses love and wonder

## Stories foster a place of belonging even in the midst of pandemic

by Marcy Schwartz

“He fell in love with it!” one participant declared about the abalone shell the young man discovered as he raked the soil on his flower farm. We had just read Toshio Mori’s story, “Abalone, Abalone, Abalone,” and we collectively took stock of the wonder, beauty and surprise surrounding the shell and its rainbow colors, “different hues, running berserk in all directions, coming together in harmony.” Another participant added that the shell’s novel presence exemplified how we “find the hidden treasure within.”

Discussions during the virtual summer People & Stories program hosted by the West Orange Public Library in New Jersey, with adult participants of varying ages and backgrounds, often circled back to moments of wonder and the intricacies of love. In Gabriel García Márquez’s story, “Balthazar’s Marvelous Afternoon,” about the creation of a spectacular birdcage that captivated all the neighbors, readers recalled the awe of seeing a museum exhibit, the focused energy of an artist at work, and the generosity of gift-giving. One participant noted that what motivated Balthazar’s work was love.

The stories we read together also delved into relationships, commitments and the mysteries of the heart. We read Chinua Achebe’s “Marriage is a Private Affair,” whose protagonist informs his father that he plans to marry a woman from another ethnic group, creating a rift between father and son that lasts for decades. At the story’s end, informed in a letter from his daughter-in-law that he has two grandsons who long to meet him, the grandfather experiences a change of heart, a moment of doubt and remorse as he wonders whether he will live long enough to meet the children. Our discussion touched on the role of religion in family and community life, the efficacy of different forms of communication (conversation versus letter-writing) to deliver important news, and the challenges of change.

“The stories we read also delved into relationships, commitments and the mysteries of the heart...the role of religion in family and community life...and the challenges of change.”

That theme—fear of change and moving into the unknown—consumes Eveline in the eponymous story by James Joyce. One participant noted that leaving everything familiar is a death, and requires mourning. Members of the group shared major changes in their lives, such as career shifts, retirement, moving to another part of the country or emigrating from other countries to the United States.

One participant said that she left her husband and raised her two children on her own, despite his taunts that she wouldn’t be able to do it. She declared, “When you know you’re right, you keep on going.”

One of our most moving discussions about love and change followed our reading of “American History” by Judith Ortiz Cofer. Elena, the teenaged narrator, experiences first love in her affection for Eugene, a smart student whose family has moved into the house next to her tenement building. She is Puerto Rican, he is white; they share a love of books and the pain of being regarded as outsiders by their classmates.

But when Elena goes to Eugene’s house for a study date, his mother turns her away at the door, nodding toward the tenement and saying, “I don’t know how you people do it.” One of the participants likened this story to *Romeo and Juliet*. This teens’ relationship evolves against a backdrop of national mourning on the November 1963 day that President John F. Kennedy is shot. Our discussion of this story touched on evolving neighborhoods, adolescent angst, feelings of belonging or not belonging in school, loss and grief.

All of this plays out in Cofer’s story on both individual and societal levels; our conversation veered from the personal to the political. One participant who emigrated from Central America called himself a “chameleon,” another expressed his admiration for immigrants and noted that he is an “outlier” himself.

Although our sessions were held via Zoom because of the continuing risks of the pandemic, we created a virtual space of “belonging” as we listened, shared perspectives and learned from one another’s stories.

# Two recovery programs; one sacred ground for sharing

## GateHouse and Manos House participants see themselves in others' eyes

by Scott Feifer

The woman from GateHouse recovery program sat at the end of a long boardroom table that had been polished to a high, reflective shine. She read about being a teacher in another city, becoming so lost in her drinking that she forgot herself and her students.

A participant from Manos House Drug and Alcohol Rehab, a residential treatment facility for teenage males, leaned to me and whispered, "Scott, she was writing about me. That was my fourth grade teacher!"

I thought of the credo adopted by many treatment facilities: "We are here because there is no refuge from ourselves. Until we confront ourselves in the eyes and heart of others, we are running."

For more than fifteen years, I have invited participants from GateHouse and Manos House to come together—initially at the Lancaster Public Library, later at Manos and recently on our Zoom screens.

The collaborative program began when I walked into the detention center one day for a program and saw a boy who looked as if he had gone to court and not heard what he wanted to hear. In a voice of both hurt and steel, he said, "Mr. Scott, my mom showed up for a visit today and she was high as could be. She looked a mess. They made her leave."

Later, he read aloud a piece that felt like a sack of rocks tossed on to the table: "My mom chose those drugs over her kids. I guess those drugs were her kids and us, her real kids, meant nothing to her!"

I remember telling him that, an hour earlier, I had sat in a group of mothers or soon-to-be moms trying to get clean. I told him that so many of the women wrote the other side of his story, asking themselves how they could have gotten so lost in their addictions that they forgot to be the mothers they yearned to be.

I knew I wanted to bring the groups together. The two facilities were willing to give it a try. Whether seated in a fancy boardroom or on cracked plastic chairs, we delved

"Through COVID-19, as the two houses came together virtually, our monthly meetings were an antidote to isolation...a tangible sharing of grief and somehow a lightening of the burdens we feel we are carrying all alone."

into the evening's story and then held one another's stories, at first with skepticism and then with great care.

There are some moments from these shared evenings that I hold like touchstones:

- The boy who, in response to "The Man Who Found You in the Woods," wrote about the loss of his mom in a way that made his hurt palpable. A grandmother from GateHouse, deeply moved, shared her AA token as a gift to that young man.
- In discussing Abby, the protagonist of "Aftertaste," recently home from treatment and forging from home to work and back without looking up, a GateHouse participant said she knew why the character cast her gaze down. "She's afraid to look up for what she might see." Everyone understood her, and Abby, and what it means when life is hard because we can't trust others, but perhaps even worse when we can't trust ourselves, when we feel nervous in the face of time and choices.
- Same story, different year: a young man reflected on the line about "kindness being as treacherous as heroin." Through hooded eyes and with a voice that sounded tired from the truth of it, he said, "I can tell you 24/7 where I can find some drugs; I can't always tell you where I can find some kindness." Another sack of rocks tossed onto the table; more throated hums of understanding and agreement.

Through COVID-19, as the two houses came together virtually, our monthly meetings were an antidote to isolation. Recently, a GateHouse participant shared a written memory of finding her brother dead in his room. The next participant was a young man from Manos who wrote about finding his father dead.

Only after they had read their pieces aloud did they disclose that each man had hanged himself. That separate but shared trauma prompted gasps, a tangible sharing of grief and somehow a lightening of the burdens we feel we are carrying all alone.

Maybe the tenuous conversations between residents of Manos and GateHouse are possible because we are simultaneously strangers and surrogates, teachers and students, reflecting one another through the words on the pages we read and the pages we write.

For a complete list of our program partners, visit [www.peopleandstories.org/audiences](http://www.peopleandstories.org/audiences)

# Faces & voices connect in the Zoom gallery

## Lawrence Plaza seniors renew their bond in online groups

by Patricia Andres

For years, Lawrence Plaza, a rent-subsidized senior housing complex in Lawrenceville, N.J., has been fertile ground for People & Stories/Gente y Cuentos. Participants have cultivated a strong bond and a lively dynamic built over scores of in-person sessions as they shared interpretations of enduring short fiction, exchanged memories and disclosed life stories sparked by the literature.

Given that history of stimulating dialogue, I wondered how the virtual format would suit our group, which resumed in spring 2021 after a pandemic hiatus. While we missed the energetic connections of an in-person meeting, the facial expressions of participants in the Zoom “gallery,” as well as their tones of voice, created a sense of being together for ninety minutes each week.

For our penultimate session, we were eight women of different cultural, ethnic, racial and educational backgrounds—five seniors living independently at Lawrence Plaza, two non-resident seniors and two young guests, analysts at Mathematica, who are working with People & Stories on outcome assessment.

As I read Lara Vapnyar’s “Ovrashki’s Trains,” all seemed deeply engaged with the voice of the unnamed narrator, a five-year girl who tells of her daily watch near the train station for her father, whom the reader suspects early in the story will never return.

We were captivated by the child’s plaintive certainty in such lines as, “But I was somehow sure that he would come home this summer...he would take a train and come to Ovrashki. But not at night. I thought he would only come in the early evening with the rush-hour passengers.”

The young narrator invites the reader into her inner landscape as she watches the suburban train’s passengers descend to the platform. She doesn’t watch for the freight train, the scary train: “I could hear the rails groan, and I imagined them sagging more and more and finally cracking, sending the train cars crashing into our house...I thought I could save myself if I held on to the bed really tight.”

As the story moves forward with a deep emotional force that seemed to drop like a pebble in a still pond into the hearts of the listeners, we learn that our young narrator has “memories” of her father. These, though, have been stitched together from bits of overheard adult conversations, a photograph and the treasured objects her mother keeps on a bookshelf in their Moscow apartment—a well-worn stuffed rabbit, the father’s electric razor and a few small volumes of books he wrote.

She continues to wait and watch the station platform, knowing she will recognize him, based on that photograph, taken the day he disappeared from the narrator’s life. Her mother said he looked “dashing”; the narrator thinks this means “very smart.”

Eventually we witness the narrator’s deep sadness when she learns the truth of her father’s death from a heart attack four years earlier. As she wails when her uncle delivers the jarring news, we hear the piercing line, “He had to tell me again, and when he did, I started crying. Soon my nose was running and I was wiping it all over my cheeks. My uncle handed me his checkered handkerchief. It was very big, larger than my face, and itchy.”

One of our guests shared how deeply moved she felt by the story because she had lost her own father just six weeks earlier. Another participant said she hoped the story would function in our guest’s memory as the kind of capacious, familiar comfort offered by the uncle to his grieving niece.

A few days later, I received an email from our guest, saying, “I will treasure my copy of ‘Ovrashki’s Trains’ as my very own red plaid handkerchief.”

“While we missed the energetic connections of an in-person meeting, the facial expressions of participants in the Zoom ‘gallery,’ as well as their tones of voice, created a sense of being together for ninety minutes each week.”

## P&S/GyC Supporters

Bunbury Fund  
Church & Dwight  
Employee Giving Fund  
Edward T. Cone  
Foundation  
Gordon and Llura Gund  
Fund of the Princeton  
Area Community  
Foundation  
Janssen  
Pharmaceuticals, Inc.  
Jewish Community  
Foundation of  
MetroWest New Jersey  
Lawrence Township  
Community Foundation  
Milken Family  
Foundation  
National Endowment for  
the Arts  
National Endowment for  
the Humanities  
New Jersey Arts and  
Culture Recovery Fund  
New Jersey Council for  
the Humanities  
New Jersey State  
Council on the Arts  
PNC Charitable Trusts  
PNC Wealth  
Management  
Princeton Public Library  
Princeton Senior  
Resource Center  
Princeton University  
Press  
Rita Allen Foundation  
The Geraldine R. Dodge  
Foundation  
The Reading Group  
The Thendara  
Foundation

## On the bookshelf...

*Teaching for Black Lives*, edited by Dyan Watson, Jesse Hagopian and Wayne Au. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, 2018.

At times, while reading the provocative and timely anthology, *Teaching for Black Lives*, I heard echoes of Paulo Freire and the principles that undergird *People & Stories/Gente y Cuentos*: democracy, community, empowerment, justice and respect for every person's views and life experience.

Teaching for Black lives isn't just a matter of providing "diverse" curricula, according to the book's contributors, a multi-racial group of writers, scholars and K-12 educators from across the United States.

Rather, teaching that is truly anti-racist must challenge and interrogate traditional models of education in which those in power seek to perpetuate the status quo and tell the story their way, even if that means whitewashing history or marginalizing disruptive voices.

To truly make Black lives matter in schools, write the editors of Rethinking Schools, the nonprofit that published the anthology, teachers "need to nurture communities of mutual respect and empathy" that take shape through inquiry, creative risk-taking and collaboration among participants and leaders.

I thought about how *People & Stories* discussions—driven by questions, built on the idea that we learn most authentically when we learn together—honor those ideas. And I thought about how, as a facilitator, I can do even more to elicit and lift up voices that have typically been erased, both through my selection of stories and the ways I approach them. I can be even more mindful about sharing "authority" in the group, encouraging participants to challenge and interrogate the texts we read as well as teasing out their shadows, tensions and poetic language.

The anthology includes classroom case studies on topics from Reconstruction to school desegregation to the nuanced history of the 1963 March on Washington. There are chapters devoted to teaching about gentrification, mass incarceration, the schools-to-prisons pipeline and the use of both restorative and transformative justice—an examination of the structures and conditions that lead to wrongdoing and how to remediate them. One section, equal parts pain and inspiration, is called "Teaching Blackness, Loving Blackness and Exploring Identity."

James Baldwin's 1963 "A Talk to Teachers" felt especially resonant as I prepared to lead a recent discussion of Judith Ortiz Cofer's "American History." Baldwin exhorts teachers to show students that "American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it..." In *People & Stories*, we aim to voice that complexity.

PEOPLE & STORIES

GENTE Y CUENTOS

295 Eggerts Crossing Road  
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648



